

February 16, 2015

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RE: HB 451 – House Education Committee – State Capitol, Helena, MT

Madam Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for opportunity to share our stories. My name is Kat Patterson. I live in Bozeman with my family. I am the co-chair of the Montana Advocacy Coalition and the proud mother of two children, one of who is here with me. This is my daughter Evie. As you can see she is beautiful. What you can't see, is how smart and full of potential she is despite being autistic.

From the moment my husband and I first found out that we were going to be parents, we started dreaming about the person our child was going to become. We had high hopes about her future and expectations that she would change the world. This all changed when we become the parents of a disabled child. Not because her future become any less important, but because we had to face the harsh reality that she may never be given the opportunity to live up to her full potential. This bill would help change that.

When you have a child who is very much capable of learning, but not in the same way or at the same pace as other children, you need to take a different approach to their education and allow them extra time. Two extra years would make a huge difference for these children. It would give them the opportunity to transition into college, the job market or independence at a more gradual pace that is better suited to their challenges.

I've made peace with the fact that my daughter may never become a doctor, a lawyer or even completely fit into our society, but she still has the potential to do great things and live a meaningful happy life. Does she not deserve the opportunity to have that? Don't all of our children deserve that?

We will be judged by how we treat the least among us. Please pass this bill.

Thank you.



Kat Patterson  
Bozeman, MT  
Montana Advocacy Coalition  
"People not Numbers"

"The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children." —Dietrich Bonhoeffer